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## A DEMONSTRATION OF SPANISH CLASS-ROOM WORK

In response to an appeal for articles written by teachers in the secondary schools which appeared in a recent number of *THE MODERN LANGUAGE JOURNAL*, I beg to submit the following, hoping that therefrom someone perhaps may receive an inspiration.

Living as we do in the extreme southwestern corner of the United States in a section rich in Spanish tradition and atmosphere, it is not difficult to locate the reason for the great interest in the Spanish language manifested here. The problem is how to foster and use that interest to the best advantage. My solution has come by means of the Direct Method, with its natural concomitant of live, wide-awake classes. Let us reserve for future discussion a description of our class period and of the results we get, for naturally where there is, as is the case in this city, so large a Spanish speaking population, the results demanded by the pupils and their families are of a much higher standard than would be true in a city with a small Spanish colony.

For the present I desire to describe a "demonstration" which we gave last Spring to the Spanish students of the Evening School. Not being favorable to the old "play" with its many rehearsals, grease-paint, etc., where much time is consumed and little is really gained, and yet wishing to accede to the requests of numerous parents as well as of all the members of the night classes, to see some of the day work, the idea came to me late one Saturday night to use the plan of the business world (my classes are in Commercial Spanish) and give a demonstration. The Monday following I approached my students individually and in groups with the request that they assist their teacher in showing our guests some of our realistic ways of reproducing well-known experiences of every day life, such as the students will inevitably experience sooner or later. They all assented cheerfully, pleased at the idea of doing something for their instructor; and I may safely say that not to a single one came the idea of self-display, one of my greatest objections to the old "play." All of the numbers on the program had been previously produced in the class-room, so no rehearsals were needed and no time was taken in this manner.

In whatever we may do I always include all types of my pupils, weak and strong, for I feel that the latter do not need whatever good may accrue as much as do the former, so in this case, some of the poorest as well as some of the strongest in each class appeared. Also in the large groups appearing, the pupils were of all ages, as in some of my classes I have all grades from junior college to freshmen and all were represented. Moreover, my classes include four groups, i.e. one group or section for each of four semesters, the extent of my work. To get a full representation, two or more numbers were produced by each class. The different numbers were assigned on Monday and the program was presented on Wednesday evening, which will bear out my statement that no time was spent in rehearsals.

In our classes we always attempt to introduce topics of interest in our civic lives and here so close to the border, we have much of the "fiesta" spirit, so we study each and all of the "fiestas" in class. The teacher gives a dictation of the approaching holiday and then a few minutes each day is spent in discussing the "fiesta," thus the pupils acquire with very little effort an extensive practical vocabulary, one of great interest to all. As our demonstration occurred during the Lenten period, just before Easter, which is a season of such intense interest to the Spaniard, and as we had been studying the Spanish Lenten and Easter customs, the first number was devoted to this topic. The ten or twelve pupils taking part in this number came from two classes who had begun their study of Spanish the previous September. Reproducing faithfully the class period, they entered the room quietly, leaving their papers on my desk as they went to their seats (which is their daily custom), remaining standing beside their desks until their teacher entered, when they returned her greeting and took their seats. Their teacher following their lead, went through the daily routine, calling the roll to which they (as always) responded with proverbs, giving the assignment for the following day, etc. Then she took up the special subject, and for some fifteen minutes, questions, some new, some having been asked before, were asked and answered to the best of the ability of the pupils. Some made mistakes of course; I repeat, this was merely a demonstration of every day's work. The class was dismissed in the usual way and passed out.

In the beginning class original conversations or dialogues form an attractive part of the class hour and the second number was a conversation produced by a group of three big boys (one a senior, the other two juniors). They chose a reproduction of their Spanish class, one taking the part of the teacher and though he was really one of the poorest students in the whole series, his imitation was very good and as interesting as it was good-natured. Of course, in this as in all the numbers, the imagination was very active supplying the necessary "properties," "make-ups," etc.

In our second and third semester classes, we read the charming little stories in Harrison's Spanish Reader, later we present them and then rewrite them in our own words. The third number was given by two more big boys, both Juniors. One read his own clever account of the poor little chicken and as he mentioned the various fowls taking part in the story, the other lad produced artificial fowls until we had a complete barnyard scene, and if one had known no Spanish, he could have followed with ease the youth's delightful rendition of the quaint little story.

In our second year classes we study current events, not in the old way, a certain day assigned to current events with the usual result of the pupil clipping his current event from some Spanish periodical and reading it in class and paying little heed to those given by the other members of the class, a delightfully easy way of preparing one's lesson and of spending the class period, but of very little value. In our classes, each day a student gives a brief current event, standing in front of the class as he does so. These are assigned by the teacher and are faithfully prepared and rendered by the pupils. No one is ever exempt and as the choice of the subject discussed is left to the pupil (and he usually discusses that that interests him most), no one considers it a hardship, but all anticipate the daily current event with great pleasure. One of the most diffident boys in the class was asked to give a current event for our fourth number. As he is interested in scientific matters, he gave us an excellent talk on paper, the reasons for its advance in price, his own deductions of the benefits to be derived from a scarcity of paper, resulting in fewer and better books and periodicals, etc., etc.

Realizing the difficulty of asking and answering questions of

direction intelligently and as the need for such information is very great in our locality, in our second year classes, each day for a number of weeks, the instructor makes an assignment about as follows (but of course in Spanish): We are at the Carnegie Public Library and you wish to go to the Court House—how would you ask me for the information and how would I reply? In this way we learn the names of all of the places of interest in the city. From the most advanced class, a boy and a girl reproduced the scene: they met on the street, she was a stranger; he, with cap in hand, answered courteously and carefully her several questions of direction to various places. It was a charming, simple, little scene and one that might occur at any moment on our streets.

The sixth number was another conversation by two girls from the beginning class, one a postgraduate and the other a little freshman. Their number was a telephone conversation. Here we had "properties" in a limited way. The father of the older girl is in the employ of the telephone company and so she brought two desk 'phones. The other girl used the wall instrument in the room. The older girl took first the part of central, making the imaginary connection from one of the desk 'phones. Then rising she went to the other one, taking the part of her mother at first, and later of herself. The conversation was delightful and girlish, necessarily limited by their own small vocabularies, but easy and interesting.

In our classes we study Geography, also, particularly the Geography of Latin America. The seventh number was a lesson in Geography recited by a little girl in her second semester. I had told her that I would ask her questions about Latin America and that was all the preliminary information that she had had. But she answered questions for some ten minutes, as to capitals, boundaries, population, rivers, mountains, etc., locating the point in question when possible, on the map.

In our second year classes, we write compositions, the most important and final one of the course being on our commercial relations with Latin America. The class is assigned outside references, which they read and later discuss in class. (Some of the references unfortunately are in English but they always take their notes in Spanish, which to me is interesting). One of

my big boys, a senior, read his composition on this subject. While a very ordinary student, I believe that his composition would not be surpassed in English by any English student of equal grade.

In our fourth semester stress is placed on business, as correspondence, office scenes, etc. For our ninth number three members of this class (two boys and a girl), gave a typical office scene. The boys entered singly and after greeting one another, removed coats and went to work, one at his books, the other going through his mail, all the while keeping up a conversation. Then the latter pressed the button in his desk, summoning his stenographer. Upon her entrance with pencil and note-book in hand, both boys quickly arose, replaced their coats, arranged her chair and stood until she was seated (truly Spanish in courtesy!), then she really "took" the letters desired, asking an occasional question or making a modest suggestion, and quietly passed out to the stenographic room to "transcribe her letters." The boys, after a brief continuation of their interrupted conversation, discovered that they were hungry and went out to lunch together.

As said above, we reproduce in our simple ways all stories read, so our last number was an original dramatization of the story of the Three Bears by four girls from the third semester section. However, before the dramatization a fifth girl told the story of the playlet following. In this class there chances to be a tiny dwarf of humble origin but much beloved by both teachers and pupils; she was the little bear, doing the part perfectly. Our "properties" here consisted of three bowls, filled with water for realism's sake, a tiny three-legged stool and additional chairs for the beds. The dialogue was all original and much of it was impromptu, the "actresses" enjoying themselves fully as much as the audience.

This was our program. Next term I shall make it a bit longer and invite a larger number of guests. But it will be just as informal as it was this year, for I do not desire that the pupils have a feeling of self-display or of "showing off" their teacher. We shall merely demonstrate to those interested how we acquire the big active vocabularies we possess.

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